

Draft Pine Mountain Late- Successional Reserve Habitat Protection and Enhancement Project

RecreationReport

Prepared by:

for:

Upper Lake Ranger District
Mendocino National Forest

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Introduction

In the Pine Mountain Late-Successional Reserve Habitat Protection and Enhancement Project (Pine Mountain Project), the Mendocino National Forest Upper Lake Ranger District is proposing to conduct fuels reduction and habitat enhancement treatments on approximately 7,830 acres southwest of Lake Pillsbury in the Pine Mountain vicinity. The recreation specialist report for the Pine Mountain project is intended to describe the recreation resource in the planning area and analyze the impact of the project's alternatives on those resources.

Regulatory Framework

Various Federal laws, Forest Service Handbook and Manual directives, as well as Mendocino National Forest LRMP management directives form the framework to which projects such as Pine Mountain project must conform. The components of this regulatory framework, and the direction they give to management of the recreation resource are listed below.

Forest Plan Direction

The 1995 Mendocino National Forest LRMP directs the management of the Mendocino National Forest. The LRMP contains direction for management of the recreation resource on the Forest; various components of the LRMP, such as Forest Goals, Standards, and Guidelines, must be consulted when determining a project's compliance with the Forest's recreation management direction. The LRMP also establishes management areas that guide activities across the Forest. There are three management areas in the Pine Mountain project planning area. These are: Management Area 8 – Round Mountain, Management Area 10 – Ericson Ridge, and Management Area 20 – Pine Mountain.

Forest Goals for Recreation

The Mendocino LRMP sets out the following Forest Management Goal that relates to recreational opportunities on the Forest:

Provide a full range of developed and dispersed recreation opportunities at levels meeting projected demand and within the physical limits and resource capabilities of the Forest.
(LRMP p. IV-3)

In addition, the LRMP describes the following Desired Future Condition of the Forest, as it relates to recreation (LRMP IV-6):

The Forest will continue to offer a wide variety of recreation opportunities with emphasis on dispersed activities and water oriented recreation. Improved public access to portions of the Forest will facilitate meeting increased recreation demands. Off-highway-vehicle use will be on designated routes with the major concentration of use in the southern portions of the Forest. Most other dispersed uses will continue Forest-wide following the current use patterns.

The heaviest demand for developed recreation facilities will continue to be centered around water oriented activities. The management emphasis will be directed toward these sites with additional capacity developed as use at existing sites approaches capacity, and as funding becomes available. Non-water oriented site capacity may be reduced where use does not justify expenditures for operation and maintenance of the facilities.

Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines

The Mendocino LRMP requires use of the “Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Users Guide” in managing recreation activities, settings, and experiences on the Forest. It also requires that recreation resource opportunity spectrum (ROS) classes be met for the planning area.

Management Area Direction

Relevant management area recreation management direction for the three MA’s in the planning area is to maintain the MA’s existing ROS class.

Methodology

ArcMap geographic information system was used to analyze the proposed activities with respect to their potential impact on recreation use and facilities, dispersed recreation use, and the ROS class assigned to the area. The recreation analysis considered only the land within the planning area boundary, unless otherwise noted.

Affected Environment

Existing Condition

The Mendocino National Forest offers a variety of recreational opportunities, ranging from primitive unconfined experiences found in some 233,460 acres of Wilderness to the rural setting of its recreational sites. Current recreational use of the Forest remains well below its capacity. This is due in part to the lack of water-oriented recreation opportunities and the primitive nature of the road system which serves primary Forest recreation areas.

As major metropolitan areas are approximately 3-4 hours drive from the Forest, most (approximately 50%) of the recreation visitors using the planning area are local residents who live within an hour drive (<25 miles), according to the 2008 National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) survey.

The primary season of recreational use in this area is April through November. Common recreation activities during the summer months include hiking, hunting, fishing, picnicking, wildlife viewing, sightseeing, driving for pleasure, four-wheeling (4WD), motorcycle and ATV use, and primitive camping.

Statistics from the Forest’s NVUM survey indicate that approximately 31 % of visitors to the MNF reported a motorized use as their primary activity on the Forest, 24% reported a non-motorized use, and over 45% reported their main activity was something else, such as viewing natural features, relaxing, or hiking/walking. The motorized uses in the area include OHV use as well as driving for pleasure.

The planning area contains a limited amount of motorized, non-motorized, or other recreation resources. There are no developed campgrounds in the planning area, but does contain a Lookout rental (Pine Mountain Lookout, open between May 1 through October 31 annually). There are also **no Inventoried Roadless Areas**, Wilderness Areas, or Wild and Scenic Rivers within the planning area.

The recreation environment potentially affected by the Pine Mountain project includes of 2 non-motorized trails; Benmore (2.23 of 3.2 miles) and Packsaddle (0.55 of 2.0 miles). Also potentially affected are two motorized/OHV trails (#38 & #40) and two dispersed camps/trails (DC85484

near Pine Mt spring and DC85489 at the end of Rd 17N73). The project also contains portions of the motorized trail network known as the California Back Country Discovery Trail. The Discovery Trail is part of a vision of an off-highway motorized route from the Mexican to the Oregon Border. Part of the Mendocino section of the trail runs through the planning area; at Pine Mountain.

In keeping with the NVUM findings on motorized use of the area, management observation indicates that motorized recreation use in the planning area is normally light (0-25 vehicles per week) on NFTS roads and trails. The exception to this, however, is during hunting season (October through November), when motorized recreation increases; even this use level is still low in a regional perspective, however (25-100 vehicles per week). (USDA FS 2009) A primary focus of motorized use in the project area (by street-legal vehicles only) is a segment of the California Back Country Discovery Trail, which is comprised of county and Forest System roads.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)

The inventoried Recreation Opportunity Spectrum class for the planning area is Roaded Natural. As the LRMP dictates that the planning area's MAs be managed consistently with their ROS class, recreation opportunities in the planning area must remain consistent with the description of the Roaded Natural opportunity class as laid out in the ROS Users Guide:

The Roaded Natural setting is described as:

Area is characterized by predominantly natural-appearing environments with moderate evidences of the sights and sounds of man. Such evidences usually harmonize with the natural environment. Interaction between users may be low to moderate, but with evidence of other users prevalent. Resource modification and utilization practices are evident, but harmonize with the natural environment. Conventional motorized use is provided for in construction standards and design of facilities. (USDA FS 1983)

The user's experience in this setting is expected to be:

About equal probability to experience affiliation with other user groups and for isolation from sights and sounds of other humans. Opportunity to have a high degree of interaction with the natural environment. Challenge and risk opportunities associated with more primitive types of recreation are not very important. Practice and testing of outdoor skills might be important. Opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized forms of recreation are possible. (USDA FS 1983)

Furthermore, Roaded Natural areas are within a half-mile of "better than primitive" roads, and the environment is expected to be modified by humans, although these modifications should be largely unnoticeable from sensitive travel routes. A moderate to high frequency of contact with other recreationists is expected on roads, and a low to moderate contact frequency is expected on trails and off routes. (USDA FS 1983)

Project Design Features

Project design features for recreation would apply to sensitive travel routes, as shown on Figure 1, as well as dispersed recreation along those travel corridors.

1. Any temporary roads and landings would be rehabilitated after completion of activities.

2. Affected trail corridors would be protected or rehabilitated after completion of activities.
3. Notify the recreating public there will be area, road, and trail closures due to the harvest activities that will be occurring in the project area. There will be public notifications at the major access roads, local newspaper, and Forest web page.
4. Have administrative closures for the Pine Mountain Lookout rental when harvest activities are scheduled in the area.
5. Signs would be posted advising trail users when project activities are going to take place.
6. Possibly re-design the trailhead for Packsaddle Trail by removing the bollards and re-locating the bulletin board to the end of the landing, approximately 440 feet east of where it is now. It may be necessary for better barriers at this location to prevent people from driving onto the trail. New signs will be needed along Packsaddle Rd. It is preferred that the approach from the South along the road be widened or re-designed to allow for vehicles to make that turn into the trailhead parking area.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1 – No Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

The No Action Alternative is not expected to result in any changes to recreation opportunities.

Cumulative Effects

As Alternative 1 has no direct or indirect effect on recreation resources, it will have no cumulative effects.

Direct and Indirect Effects Common to Alternatives 2 through 5

For the purposes of analyzing impacts to the recreation resource for the Pine Mountain project, Alternatives 2 through 5 can be considered together. Alternative 3 differs from the others by not proposing any new temporary roads. Temporary road construction, however, is not a factor for the recreation resource. Thus, the analysis that follows is an examination of the impact of the action alternatives on various aspects of the recreation resource.

Effects on Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

None of the activities proposed in any of the action alternatives would affect the status of the planning area's ROS class. The harvest and fuel break actions proposed would not alter the experience, setting, remoteness, or other characteristics of the Roaded Natural ROS class that the LRMP requires be maintained.

Effects on Trail Resources

The action alternatives may have short-term direct effects on the trail resources in the project area. In alternatives 2 through 5, harvest units and landings may be located near the Packsaddle Trail and OHV Trails 38 and 40. Landings and harvest activities for ground-based methods located near trails would cause temporary, short-term disruption to recreation users in the area. On the Packsaddle trail, a ground-based harvest landing is proposed at the site of an old landing

that recreationists often use as parking and access for the trail. During project logging operations, these trails may be temporarily closed. Project activities are not expected to have any long-term impact on trail users, however, when mitigated by the design criteria discussed above.

The action alternatives may also have a short-term direct effect on the California Discovery Trail in the project area. Fuel corridors, temporary roads, landings, and harvest units are planned along the Discovery Trail route, and may cause short-term disruption to users of the trail during implementation. Mitigation measures discussed above would address these disruptions.

Effects on Dispersed Recreation

Alternatives 2 through 5 may also have a short-term direct effect on dispersed recreation activities in the planning area. Typical dispersed recreation activities for the area include camping, gathering of forest products such as mushrooms and firewood, and hunting. Proposed harvest activities along the planning area may temporarily disrupt these dispersed recreation uses during harvest operations.

Effects on Access to Recreation Resources

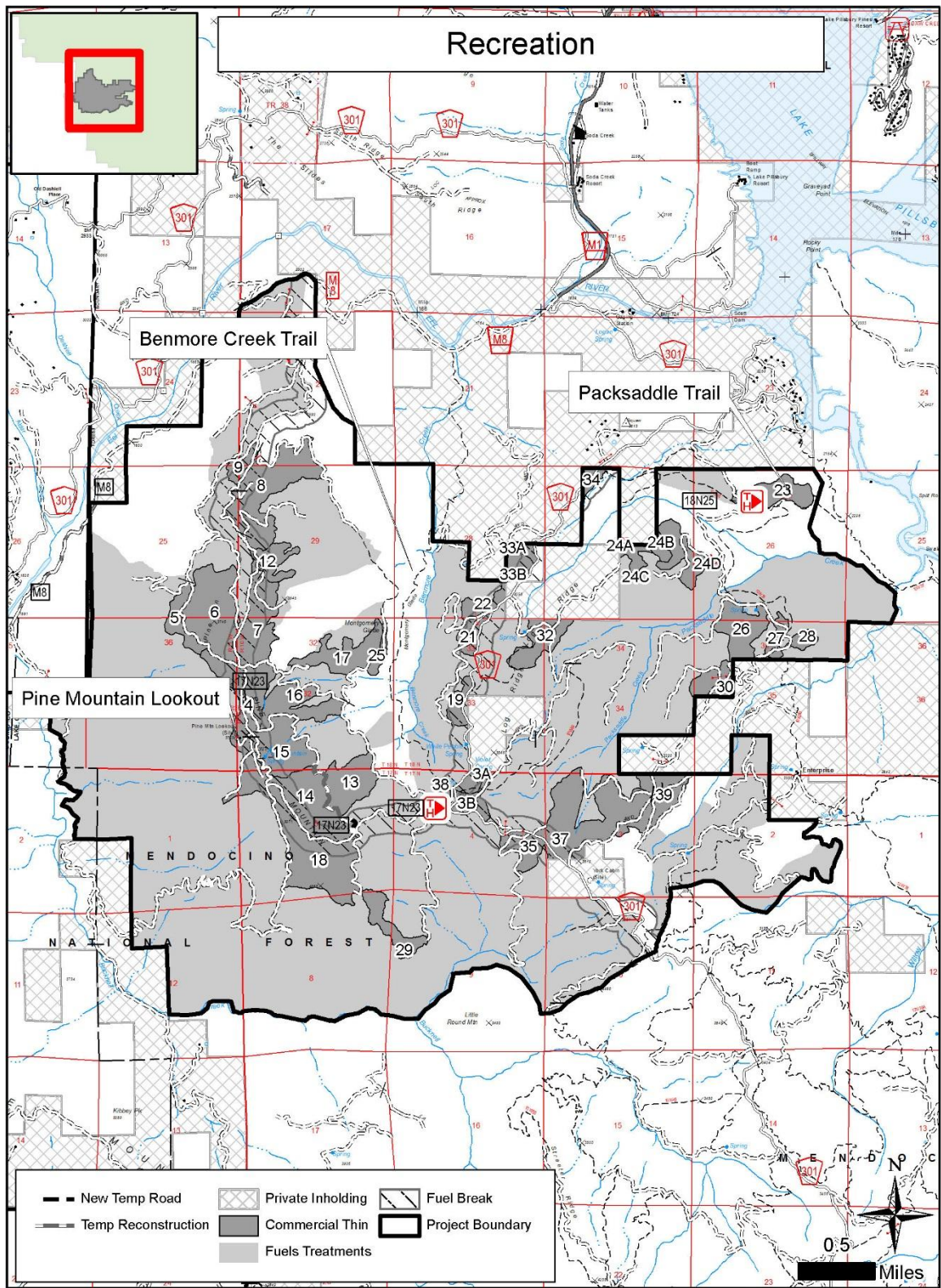
Additionally, the alternatives would have a short-term impact on access to recreation activities. During active logging, roads would be temporarily closed. During log hauling, main arterial roads would remain open, and there would be some temporary closures on lesser standard roads. Access to dispersed and trail-based recreation resources would therefore be negatively impacted during active logging, and potentially impacted during log hauling operations.

Summary of Effects of Alternatives 2 through 5 on Recreation

Alternatives 2 through 5 are not expected to have a long-term effect on any recreation resource in the Pine Mountain planning area. These alternatives would have a short-term, temporary impact on recreation resources during project implementation. Dispersed recreation, as well as trail-based recreation activities would be disrupted, and would likely be inaccessible due to visitor safety concerns while logging activities and fuel break construction is ongoing.

Cumulative Effects

Past management activities near the recreation resources in the planning area are limited to various controlled burn actions, including broadcast burns and burning of piled material. These past activities would not contribute to any impact of the Pine Mountain project. There are no known present management activities in the area that would potentially impact the area's future recreation resources. There are no foreseeable cumulative effects from the project to recreation since the availability of the sites will remain the same after the project is completed.



Map 1. Revised proposed action, recreation resource

References

USDA Forest Service 1982. ROS Users Guide. Washington DC: USDA Forest Service.

USDA Forest Service 1995. Land and Resource Management Plan: Mendocino National Forest.
San Francisco, CA: USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region.